

Unity's Edge

The swirling blue vortex of a jump gate flared to life against the backdrop of stars. From its maw emerged a mixed wing of Earth Alliance Starfuries and Minbari Nials, their formation tight and disciplined as they transitioned back to normal space.

Commander Susan Ivanova's voice crackled over the comm: "All fighters, this is Alpha Leader. Sensors show multiple Drakh vessels ahead. Maintain formation until my mark."

As they cleared the gate's influence, the pilots quickly oriented themselves. The Drakh squadron loomed in the distance, a menacing collection of angular ships that seemed to absorb the light around them.

"Entering Drakh engagement envelope in 3... 2... 1... Mark!" Ivanova's command rang out.

In that instant, the carefully orchestrated chaos began. The Nials, their gravimetric drives flaring, suddenly accelerated to attack speed. They shot forward like silver arrows, piercing through the outer defensive screen of the Drakh forces.

Simultaneously, the Starfuries executed a complex series of evasive maneuvers. Each fighter abruptly changed vector, spinning and jinking in seemingly random patterns. Their movements were so erratic and unpredictable that Drakh targeting computers struggled to get a lock.

Wing Leader Lenann's calm voice cut through the comm chatter: "Nial squadrons, engage their capital ships. Human allies, exploit the confusion and target their fighter screen."

The Starfuries' erratic movements allowed them to slip through gaps in the Drakh's defensive fire. Once inside the enemy formation, they unleashed their impressive firepower, their pulse cannons blazing as they engaged in furious dogfights with Drakh fighters.

Meanwhile, the Nials, having broken through the initial defenses with their superior speed, began strafing runs on the larger Drakh vessels. Their neutron cannons carved glowing scars across the enemy ships' hulls.

This two-pronged assault - the Nials striking hard and fast at capital ships while the Starfuries wreaked havoc among the fighter squadrons - threw the Drakh forces into disarray. The combined human and Minbari tactics proved too much for the enemy to counter effectively.

As the battle raged on, it became clear that this innovative use of the mixed fighter wing's strengths had given them a decisive advantage. The Drakh, faced with an opponent that could both outmaneuver and outgun them, began to realize the true power of the alliance they had challenged.

As the battle wound down, two Starfuries maneuvered close to a damaged Nial fighter. Using their retractable claws, they carefully latched onto the Minbari craft and began towing it away from the combat zone.

Commander Ivanova watched the rescue operation on her tactical display, then keyed her comm. "All units, prepare for phase two. Remember, we need to look vulnerable." She was pleased to note losses had been light; they had to look worse off than they really were.

The mixed fighter group began a staged withdrawal towards the jump gate, some fighters deliberately flying erratically as if damaged. Suddenly, multiple swirling vortexes tore open the fabric of space. More Drakh ships poured through the jump points, their angular forms bristling with weapons.

A grim smile played across Ivanova's lips. "They fell for it," she muttered, then broadcast on a secure channel, "Ivanova to command. The fish are in the net. Repeat, the fish are in the net."

Before the Drakh could fully deploy, more jump points flared to life. A mixed fleet of Minbari and Earth Force capital units emerged from hyperspace, their weapons already charging.

As her Starfury entered the safety of the jump gate, Ivanova keyed her comm one last time. "I hope the big boys do as well as we did," she said, a hint of pride in her voice as the blue vortex swallowed her fighter.

The big boys were doing their best, and that was very good indeed.

The allied task force materialized from hyperspace in perfect synchronization—two Minbari Sharlin warcruisers flanking two Omegas, one an Omega-X hybrid, with a White Star positioned as vanguard. The Earth Alliance Warlock-class *EAS Persephone* brought up the rear, its shadow-inspired armor glinting ominously. Below them, eight Drakh motherships loomed like jagged mountains, surrounded by swarms of gunboats and cruiser escorts. Their formations were in disarray, as they attempted to change from succoring the remnants of the original squadron and pursuit to meeting a sudden threat on an unexpected axis.

Alyt Nuroon's voice cut through the comm: "Sharlins, target their motherships. Neutron cannons at full dispersal." The Minbari warships pivoted, their crystalline hulls shimmering with stealth distortion as neutron beams lanced outward. A Drakh mothership's bio-organic armor flared white-hot before rupturing, spilling fighters like spores from a dying plant.

The *EAS Persephone's* commander, Commodore Mara Ellis, barked orders: "All forward particle beams—fire on their cruisers! Thunderbolts, clear the gunboat screen!" Twin Aegis-class beams sliced through a Drakh cruiser, bypassing its organic shields and igniting internal plasma conduits.

The Drakh regrouped swiftly. Beam hits started peppering the *Churchill* and the Sharlins, but their hulls were holding up to the fire for now. The fighter battle was getting less one-sided, though the IA force still had the initiative. Plague missiles streaked toward the Omegas, their warheads pulsing with virulent nanotech. The *EAS Churchill's* interceptor grid flared to life, shredding half the projectiles, but one struck its starboard hull. Emergency bulkheads sealed as decontamination teams scrambled. The *Acheron* used the debris of one of the motherships killed in the initial fighter sweep to block the worst of the fire directed at her and her interceptor grid took care of the rest.

White Star *Valen's Blade*, commanded by Ranger Captain Telonn, exploited the chaos. Banking sharply on its gravitic drives, it unleashed a volley of molecular pulsars into the flank of a Drakh mothership. "Their structural weaknesses align with Shadow vessel profiles," Telonn noted coldly. "Target convergence points."

As the battle intensified, the *EAS Acheron*, the vanilla Omega-class destroyer under the command of Captain Jack Maynard, maneuvered into position. Maynard's voice, gruff but steady, cut through the comm chatter: "*Acheron* to all allied ships. We're detecting a weak spot in the Drakh formation's port flank. Preparing to exploit."

With the precision born from years of deep space exploration, Maynard guided the *Acheron* through a series of intricate maneuvers, using the debris field for cover. Suddenly, the destroyer emerged from behind a destroyed Drakh cruiser, unleashing a devastating alpha strike against an unsuspecting mothership.

"Now that's how we did it in the old days!" Maynard exclaimed as the Drakh vessel's organic hull buckled under the assault. His tactical acumen had opened a critical gap in the enemy's defenses, allowing allied forces to press their advantage.

Commodore Ellis nodded in approval. "Looks like your old CO still has a few tricks up his sleeve, Sheridan," she muttered, knowing the *Acheron*'s success would be reported to the President of the Interstellar Alliance. She reached a decision. It was time. Ellis's hand hovered over the comm panel for a heartbeat before stabbing it decisively. Her voice was steel as she gave an order not used since the darkest days of the Earth-Minbari War: "Thunderbolt Squadrons 7 and 9, this is *Persephone* Actual. Arm HIVATs. Authorization code Sierra-Tango-7."

She paused, consciously did not gulp, and repeated: "Authorization Sierra-Tango-7 confirmed. Let's hope history judges this better than the last time we dusted off the nuclear playbook."

On the tactical display, Alyt Nuroon's hologram nodded. "The Drakh chose their enemy. Let the stars record they also chose their end."

Twelve Thunderbolts broke from the fray, their pilots' hearts pounding. Each fighter carried a payload that could vaporize a city. Squadron Leader Chen's voice crackled over the comm: "All units, activate stealth systems and prepare for sprint-and-drift. We get one shot at this."

The Thunderbolts cut their main drives, relying on maneuvering thrusters as they glided towards the Drakh formation. Alyt Nuroon's Sharlin provided covering fire, its neutron cannons clearing a path through the remaining gunboats with surgical precision.

"Thirty seconds to optimal range," Chen announced, his voice tight. "Arm warheads... now."

A chorus of confirmations followed as each pilot engaged their weapon's arming sequence. The Drakh, finally aware of the imminent threat, began to react. Energy beams lashed out, catching one Starfury in a direct hit. The fighter exploded silently, its nuclear payload thankfully inert.

"Twenty seconds," Chen continued, unfazed. "All units prepare to break and fire on my mark."

The remaining eleven Thunderbolts surged forward, engines flaring to life. Drakh point-defense systems opened up, filling space with a lethal web of energy.

"Mark!"

Eleven 50-megaton warheads streaked towards their targets. Time seemed to slow as the pilots pulled away, praying their ECM would keep them alive for the next few crucial seconds.

Then, the universe went white.

The first detonations caught two Drakh motherships. Their organic hulls boiled away in an instant, leaving only rapidly expanding clouds of superheated plasma. Subsequent hits landed milliseconds later, their combined shockwaves amplifying the destruction.

On the *Persephone's* bridge, sensor displays went crazy. "Multiple EMP pulses detected!" an officer shouted. "Radiation levels high, but within the expected range"

As the blinding light faded, the devastation became clear. Where once eight Drakh capital ships had stood, only three remained – and those were listing badly, huge sections of their hulls simply gone.

Alyt Nuroon watched the radiation blooms fade. "Report," he ordered.

"Three more Drakh motherships destroyed, Alyt," his second replied. "Human weapons... crude, but . . . in this case, effective."

Nuroon's eyes flicked to a feed of Starfuries shepherding damaged Nials. "Crude tools in skilled hands," he said, "can carve finer than a dull thal'mar." A smile might have considered alighting on his face for a microsecond.

The younger warrior bowed, chastened. "As you say, Alyt."

On the *EAS Persephone*, Ellis stared at the tactical display, her face grim. "Status of our Thunderbolts?"

A tense moment passed before the reply came: "Nine accounted for, Captain. We lost three."

The remaining Drakh motherships shuddered as their jump engines began cycling. Commodore Ellis slammed her fist on the armrest. "They're prepping for jump! All batteries, concentrate fire on the lead mothership's engine cluster!"

Drakh gunboats suddenly broke formation in a coordinated swarm. Plasma-charged fighters rammed into the EarthForce-Minbari lines, their kamikaze attacks creating fiery debris fields that scattered targeting systems.

Alyt Nuroon's voice cut through the comm static: "Their fighters are overloading reactors! Containment fields collapsing!" A Sharlin warcruiser banked sharply as three gunboats detonated against its crystalline hull, scoring blackened fissures in the pristine surface.

Ranger Captain Telonn cursed in Adronato as his White Star's sensors flared. "*Valen's Blade*, evasive pattern Zeta! They're using their dead as shrapnel!" The sleek vessel corkscrewed through the chaos, molecular pulsars shredding four gunboats mid-dive.

On the *Persephone's* bridge, tactical officer Reyes shouted: "Lead mothership's jump point forming! HIVAT-armed Thunderbolts still thirty seconds from firing solution!"

The three surviving Drakh capital ships vanished into swirling vortices, their escape bought with the lives of 214 fighters and 37 gunboats. Sensor logs later showed telltale organic residue - evidence they'd jettisoned entire crew sections to hasten engine spin-up.

Commodore Ellis stared at the tactical display. "They'll regroup beyond the Rim."

Alyt Nuroon's hologram nodded grimly. "But today they learned the price of challenging the Alliance. Let them carry that fear back to their masters. Let them fear our unity, for it is our ultimate weapon." Jack Maynard added, "We'll bring it to them, never doubt it."

As cleanup operations began, the *Valen's Blade* recovered a damaged Nial fighter pod - its pilot still alive, protected by the same debris the Drakh had weaponized. Ranger medics found Minbari glyphs freshly etched into the cockpit: "Victory's cost is written in the stars."